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T H O U G H T S

ON THE

H. Gent

NAVAL STRENGTH

OF THE

BRITISH EMPIRE.



JOHN SINCLAIR, ESQ. M.P.

16
But on the Sea be terrible, untam'd,
Unconquerable ———

Thomson's Britannia

Part 1

L O N D O N

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand,
M. DCC. LXXXII.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]

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BRITAN
NICVM

Printed by the Author, at the

University Press, Cambridge.

London: Printed by the Author, at the

L O N D O N

Printed for T. Cadogan, in the Strand.

M. DCC. LXXX.

[Price One Guinea]

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IT is a circumstance well known to the world in general, that a certain noble Lord, a member of the lower house, who lately sat at the board of Admiralty, asserted in his place in parliament, that the navy of France, might always be superior to that of England, when the French bent their whole exertions to that particular department. So dangerous an opinion coming from so respectable a quarter, naturally led the author to investigate the subject for his own private satisfaction. Though fully convinced from that inquiry that the noble Lord's assertion was perfectly ill-grounded, yet he trusted that some abler hand would have undertaken the task of refuting it. Find-
ing

ing however that the navy of England is at present without any literary champion, he has thrown together his thoughts upon the subject with a view of contributing his mite to counteract the dispiriting effects of an idea, which cannot be too speedily and thoroughly exploded.

THOUGHTS

ON THE

NAVAL STRENGTH

OF THE

BRITISH EMPIRE.

WHEN the affairs of a nation are unsuccessfully conducted, it is natural to view every circumstance in the darkest light. — Its present situation is always painted in the most deplorable colours; its future prospects are considered to be still more gloomy: nay political sceptics do not hesitate to doubt the existence of its former splendour. In this manner the spirit of the nation is depressed, the vigour of its efforts is relaxed; its enemies exult over it, and it seems ready to crouch under the fury of their attacks.

It is difficult on any other principle to account for an idea which has been lately spread abroad, and has found its way into the great council of the nation; the tendency of which is to depreciate the former strength and character of the British Navy. — In the days of conquest and of triumph, we have always ventured to consider ourselves as the natural sovereigns of the ocean; and even foreigners, however partial they may have been to the maritime honour of their respective countries, have in general acknowledged the justice of our claim to the dominion of the sea *. How much therefore must we feel ourselves humbled, when

* “ L’Angleterre a depuis long tems gagné la supériorité sur mer,” says that respectable political author Beau-fobre. *Introduction Générale à L’Etude de la politique*, p. 314. The famous Mr. De Meul, in his *Science du Gouvernement*, tom II. p. 340, asserts, “ Que les armes navales que, la grande Bretagne entretient la rendent supérieure à quelque puissance maritime que ce soit.” The verses of Voltaire on the English nation are well known.

“ Ils sont Rois sur les eaux.

“ Leur flotte impérieuse asservissant Neptune,

“ Des bords de l’univers appelle la fortune.”

La Henriade, chant. premier.

we are told, in the days of our adversity, by one who, considering his office, his profession and character, ought not to be misinformed " that the navy of France alone
 " always was and always must be superior
 " to that of England, when the French
 " bend their whole attention to that particular department †."

The author of these sheets, having heard with infinite regret, this ill-grounded and dangerous opinion, and dreading the consequences which at a moment like the present such an assertion may produce, should it remain unrefuted, has ventured to attempt, (with the hopes of calling forth the abilities and exertion of more able and better informed persons) to state his reasons for refusing his assent to such a proposition.

† Lord Mulgrave's words, as stated in Almon's debates (37th November 1781) are, " That it was an incontrovertible truth (and the times of King William and Queen Anne produced examples of the justice of the remark) that whenever the French directed their whole attention to the improvement and increase of their marine, they rendered it superior to the fleet of Great Britain, and were able to contend with us for the dominion of the ocean."

The assertion of the noble lord to which I allude must have been grounded either upon a misconception of the natural advantages which Great Britain is possessed of for the acquisition of maritime power, or a fatal inattention to the almost uniform train of success which has attended the naval exertions of this country. — These two points I propose shortly to consider.

Extent of
coast.

1. That nation in the first place is the most likely to be powerful at sea, which has the greatest extent of coast, and consequently a greater proportion of whose inhabitants must have a natural predilection for the sea : — In this respect Great Britain claims a preference over every other state in Europe. — The sea-line of England, Scotland and Ireland, and of the adjacent islands, is calculated by Sir William Petty to extend to 3,800 miles : whereas France, whose coast contains but about 1000 miles of sea-line, is in this important article greatly inferior *.

* Petty's works, p. 259.

2. The

2. The coast of Great Britain and Ireland is not only more extensive, than that of any other power in Europe, but is also every where intersected by admirable harbours*.—Indeed the frequency and violence of the westerly winds which occasion those heaps of sand, by which the Dutch ports are blocked up, are the reasons that so many deep and commodious harbours are found upon the English side of the Channel and so few upon the French and Dutch; an advantage given us by nature, which never can be equalled by any art or expence of our neighbours†.—Nay, in respect of extent of coast and number of havens, France is not only inferior to Spain, but can scarcely stand a comparison with Italy itself‡.

Number of
harbours.

* Campbell in his Political Survey has given us a very accurate account of the harbours belonging to Great Britain.

† Political Essays, quarto, p. 15 and 16.

‡ Mr. Horfeley in his treatise on maritime affairs, p. 45, &c. proves, that France instead of being equal to Great Britain is scarcely on a par with Denmark and Sweden in respect to natural advantages for the acquisition of maritime power.

3. It

Their con-
duity.

3. It is also a considerable advantage which Great Britain enjoys, that its harbours are all contiguous to each other, and are not divided like those of France by the territories of any other power: this renders it easy for Great Britain to assemble her naval forces upon the shortest notice, and enables her to exert her whole maritime force with united vigour against any other power with which she may be at war. — Whereas the distance between the ports of Toulon and Brest, is no inconsiderable addition to the other maritime disadvantages to which France is subjected *. —

Anchorage
in our bays.

4. But had we fewer harbours, our bays alone would in general answer the purposes of commerce and of war. — Whilst the westerly winds blow, which is generally the case above half the year, our ships may ride at anchor with perfect security, in our roads. — Besides, our anchor-hold is much better than our neighbours can boast of; for our shores generally consist of a stiff clay, chalk, or hard gravel, whilst the

* M. De Real, tom. II. p. 341.

French and Dutch have nothing but rocks or loose sand to anchor on *.

5. The situation of Great Britain is also Situation.
extremely favourable to maritime power.—It is an island not confined, as Sicily, to the range of one particular sea, but unimmured by straits, finds no obstruction in sending forth her fleets to every hemisphere.—It is also fortunately placed in the very centre of Europe, and along its coast above one half of the trade of Europe must pass.—This natural advantage the great De Wit considers to be of the most essential importance †.

6. The great advantage which nature Fishing.
has given us for maritime power, in consequence of the variety of fish with which our seas abound, need not be strongly insisted upon.—It is indeed universally acknowledged that there is no part in the world where such quantities are to be met with at every season of the year, better cal-

* Bailon on Trade, p. 25.

† Interest of Holland, part 2. chap. 9.

De Real, tom. II. p. 341.

culated either for the purposes of maintaining the inhabitants of the kingdom, or of serving as a lucrative branch of commerce with other powers*.

Commerce.

7. Foreign commerce is undoubtedly a great source of naval strength, and Great Britain it is certain enjoys that advantage to as great, if not a greater extent than any other power in Europe.—But the trade carried on along the coasts of the island is of a more permanent and lasting nature, neither depending upon the fancy of foreigners nor standing in any dread of competition.—Such commerce therefore must be accounted the only sure and substantial foundation of naval power.—It has been calculated that the coasting trade itself employs 100,000 sailors; but though that account must be exaggerated, without doubt it breeds a greater number of excellent seamen

* It is calculated that 10,000 people, including apprentices, are employed along the coasts of England in the oyster fishery alone. Vide Representation of the State of the English Oyster Fisheries. P. 6.

than

than any other nation in Europe can boast of*.

8. It is also a singular advantage enjoyed by Great Britain, that it not only has a demand for shipping, but is also furnished with the principal materials which shipping requires. — I am well aware that various maritime articles are procured from other countries which it is supposed impossible for this island itself to furnish; yet this ought rather to be imputed to the inattention of the natives of the island, or to the little encouragement given by the legislature to such productions, than to any national defect in the soil or climate of the country. — If other materials however must be purchased from abroad, the English oak must always be considered for strength and firmness to be superior to the timber of our neighbours †.

Materials.

C

9. It

* “ On trouve par un calcul modéré plus de cent mille
“ matelots, pour le commerce de L'Angleterre seule, de
“ port à port.”

Remarques sur les avantages de la France, &c. p. 138.

† It was formerly an express condition in all contracts for building ships for the royal navy, that they should be built
of

Building.

9. It is well known, that the English were the first who brought the building of ships of war to its present state of perfection, and it's shipwrights still retain the high character they formerly acquired for skill in their profession. — That advantage however pertains no longer in an exclusive manner to this nation. The fatal friendship of that profligate monarch Charles the Second for his ambitious neighbour, first gave the French an opportunity of acquiring an art which they have since vainly attempted to turn to the ruin of their instructors*.

of good substantial *English* oak. But owing to the scarcity of timber, this restriction has been no longer insisted upon. — Soon after the Restoration plans were proposed by the corporation of shipwrights, for the preservation and increase of oak, which after going through all the forms of office, namely, being referred first to the attorney general, and by him to the navy board, was at last suffered to sleep in oblivion.

Letter to the Earl of Marlborough, p. 17 and 18.

* Frigates of the present construction were first built by one Pet. — English shipwrights were supposed to be so peculiarly skilful in their profession, that by their charter they were prohibited to communicate their art to any foreign prince or state. The English, says Sir William Temple, keep their neighbours in awe, by the strength of their oak, *the art of their shipwrights*, and the invincible courage of their seamen.

Vide Survey of the Constitutions of the Empire, &c.

It is impossible also for any nation Provisions to carry on an extensive commerce, or to be a great naval power, unless the soil and climate of the country be well calculated for producing proper sustenance for mariners whilst at sea. — In this particular, Great Britain and Ireland lay claim to a great superiority over every state in Europe. — Indeed the soil and climate of the British islands are much better suited for raising every species of naval provision than France or Spain; and the superior quality of the food on which they live, must also render our seamen a more hardy, and braver race of men than those of our neighbours.

The skill and experience of our Naval skill seamen cannot be equalled. — A very different race of men must be formed along the stormy coasts of this country, from that produced along the pacific shores of the Mediterranean. — Accustomed as our sailors are to the dangers of the sea, those storms which appear tremendous to others are not considered by them as attended with any risk. — Indeed if one set of men can be said to enjoy any great superiority over another,

another, it may be safely affirmed, that the British seamen, who are bred along the coasts of these islands, are entitled to that fortunate distinction.

Insular situation.

12. An insular situation is of all others the most to be preferred. The sea is undoubtedly the safest and most natural boundary, which it is very difficult to get the better of, and impossible to remove *.
 “ Athens, says Xenophon, rules the sea;
 “ but as the country of Attica is joined to
 “ the continent, it is ravaged by enemies,
 “ while the Athenians are engaged in different expeditions.—Their leaders suffer
 “ their lands to be destroyed, and secure
 “ their wealth by sending it to some island.
 “ The populace who are not possessed of
 “ lands, have no uneasiness. But if the
 “ inhabitants inhabited an island, and besides this enjoyed the empire of the sea,
 “ they would, as long as they were possessed of these advantages, be able to
 “ annoy others, and at the same time be

* Campbell's Polit. Survey, Vol. I. C. 3.—Burgh's Polit. Disquis. Book III. Ch. 3.—Craftsman, No. 340. Vol. X. p. 89.

“ out

“out of all danger of being annoyed.”

One would imagine, says Montesquieu, that Xenophon was speaking of England.

In fact, if we made the most of our insular situation by confining our whole attention to maritime affairs, and trusted our defence to a militia and to a fleet, it would soon appear, that our naval force had scarcely arrived to one half of its natural extent.—Almost our whole revenue, (at least a much greater part of it than can be done by any continental power whatsoever) might be expended in fitting out our fleets; and when only one object is kept in view, it is surely more likely to be raised to the greatest height of perfection it is capable of, than when the attention is distracted by matters of a different nature †.

* Spirit of Laws, Book XXI. C. 7.

† England, says Boccacini, Vol. I. p. 13, is surrounded by the sea, which serves her as a bulwark against the insults of her ambitious enemies, and a frontier which it costs her nothing to maintain. Whereas her neighbours the Dutch are obliged to be at a perpetual and extraordinary charge to keep out the sea on the one side, and the French on the other.

Situation of
the capital.

13. Farther. It is a great advantage, the possession of which our very enemies acknowledge, that the capital of the kingdom is not situated like that of France, in the heart of the kingdom, but that in London may be design'd all the politeness attending a royal presence, with all the spirit and activity that results from an extended commerce, and from naval power. At Paris, says Delleandere, one sees a voluntary indolence, which concerns itself about nothing that does not contribute either to pleasure or amusement; whereas in London, none are so blind as not to see, or so obstinate as not to acknowledge, that upon the prosperity of commerce, and consequently of naval power, depends the happiness of the state.

Character of
the nation.

14. The character of the English nation, steady in its pursuits, and not apt to be discomposed by every trifling obstacle, seems to be peculiarly calculated for the acquisition of maritime power. Naval strength is not the growth of a day, nor is it possible to retain it, when once acquired, without the utmost difficulty, and

the most unwearied attention. The English have proved by their conduct, for almost two centuries, the firmness and steadiness of their naval character. Whereas the maritime enthusiasm of the French has only occasionally taken place, and does not seem consistent with the natural bent and genius of the people.—Works that require great application, says Cardinal Richlieu, are little calculated for the humour and disposition of the French nation.*

15. Lastly, It is a singular, but at the same time a fortunate circumstance for this country, that to all the other advantages above mentioned, one other blessing may be added, namely, that of a free constitution; without which every other circumstance could be of little avail, and with which, it may be expected that every natural advantage we boast of may be carried to the height of perfection, and of improvement.—This is a blessing, therefore, which crowns the whole, and must

Government.

* Deslandes on maritime power, p. 120.

for

for ever render the naval force of Great-Britain greatly superior to that of her neighbours, while *she* possesses the peculiar benefits which *she* enjoys; and while *they* continue under the miserable shackles of arbitrary power *.

Having thus stated the various advantages which Britain lays claim to for the acquisition of the dominion of the sea, let us next examine what are the sources of the naval strength of our powerful rivals the French. I shall take them as stated by the Count De la Boulainvilliers, who is justly considered to be one of the most ingenious, and the best informed French authors upon the subject of politics.

Position of
France.

In the first place, this author attempts to prove, that the position of France is sufficiently favourable for forming a navy equal to that of the two maritime powers of England and Holland.

* This advantage is placed in the strongest point of view by the author of the *Remarques sur les Avantages, et les Disavantages, de la France, et de la Grand Bretagne*, p. 150.

In

In examining this subject, the author, whose only object was to rouse the spirits of his countrymen, depressed by the naval misfortunes of the last war, has prudently omitted making any comparison between the extent of coast belonging to the two nations, or the number of harbours they are possessed of; but bewilders the reader by stating, in general terms, that France possesses more ports than England in the Mediterranean sea, as if that little gulph was the only or the principal theatre of commerce and of naval power. Without disputing the truth of that assertion, or that France is nearer to Spain and Portugal, and to the coasts of Barbary, than Britain, it may be sufficient to remark, that naval strength can never depend upon such trivial circumstances.—The Mediterranean is no longer the great emporium of Europe; and the most powerful maritime nation there, may be but little respected in every other hemisphere.

This author, indeed, is so anxious to prove that France ought to be the first maritime power in Europe, that he states those very

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circum-

circumstances as advantages in its favour, which ought to be accounted some of the greatest obstacles that country has to contend with.—The navy of France, he observes, may be divided into two branches, whose interests may be separate, and which may have different objects in view.—This is actually the case: but the consequence of it is, that the squadrons of Toulon and Brest, are more like the fleets of confederates, than of one powerful state.—Nor is the mild and temperate climate of France (a circumstance he lays much weight upon) at all favourable to the maritime power of that country.—The brave, hardy, and experienced sailor, is not bred by gentle zephyrs, but amidst the storms and tempests of the north: and that man is most likely to be master of himself amidst the confusion and horrors of a naval fight, who has been most accustomed to the fury of the tempest, and to the dangers of the sea*.

Its commerce.

2. The Count de Boullainvilliers in the second place attempts to prove, that the commerce of France is sufficient to furnish

* Vide, Monson's Naval Tracts, Book III.

the means of disputing the empire of the sea, even with the united strength of England and Holland.

This ingenious author amuses himself so much with the naval strength which France *might have* by increasing its trade in the Mediterranean, and by wise and prudent regulations tending to augment its commerce in grain, that until it is proved that such circumstances are likely to take place it will be needless to bestow upon them much consideration. It is sufficient to remark that foreign or colonial commerce can never be a permanent basis of naval strength.—That nation is the most likely to continue powerful at sea, which is the best calculated to enjoy great trade, exclusive of connexions with its neighbours; and even a Frenchman will acknowledge, that if the commerce of France was reduced to its coasting trade, it would not be very considerable*.

D 2

3. In

* Maffie, in his Historical Account of the Naval Power of France, gives us the following state of the number of French ships and sailors, Anno 1744.

Ships.

Commodities

3. In the third place, we are entertained with some arguments in proof of this assertion; that the commodities of France require as many ships to transport them as those of Holland and England united.

If we could imagine with this author that the one hundred and fifty millions of acres which France contains, were all subjected to the labours of the husbandman, his problem even in that case would be difficult to prove. — He is either ignorant or unwilling to acknowledge that the commerce of coal alone (an article of transportation in which France can never rival us) employs more seamen than all the coasting trade of that country; and were it not for the absurd and impolitic duty which is laid upon that necessary of life, it might alone be accounted a sufficient foundation for ac-

		Ships.	Men.
European commerce	—	1000	20000
Fisheries	—	600	27000
Sugar colonies	—	700	14000
		2300	61000

Little of this naval strength can be considered of so lasting and durable a nature as the coasting trade of England.

quiring

quiring the maritime empire. This author indeed must be not a little at a loss to assign just grounds for the naval pretensions of the French, when he assigns the predilection for the modes and fashions of that country as one of the great supports of its marine. — Gewgaws, and little fripperies, will never be able to acquire the dominion of that rough and boisterous element.

4. Under the head of materials, the Count has not favoured us with any important observations: though he claims in this respect an independence on the other powers in Europe, yet that claim is perfectly without foundation. — All the principal materials of the French marine are purchased from foreigners. — Nor is it possible that its concerns should be distinct from those of the other powers in Europe. — Great maritime empires must always interest

Materials,

" Sir Thomas Clarges says " The strength of England consists in its marine, in which, for want of men, France can never equal us; their trade will not breed them. A ship of 50 tons will carry 100,000 l. of their goods. " Ours are bulky goods, and require 20 times more."

Grey's Debates, vol. viii. p. 366.

them-

themselves in the prosperity of those nations with whom they have any commercial intercourse.

Population.

Though the population of France is confessedly superior to that of England, yet it is absurd on that account to affirm that it ought proportionably to have a greater number of seamen. — There might be some justice in this assertion had France all its inhabitants upon the coast. But as long as the greatest part of the natives of the British isles, and on the whole by far a greater number than France can boast of, must necessarily live in the neighbourhood of the sea, even in the article of population Great Britain may claim the preference. — Sir William Petty calculates that every part of England, Scotland and Ireland, is, one with another, but twelve miles from the sea. Whereas France, by the same method of computation, is no less than from sixty-five to seventy: a naval advantage in favour of Great Britain which cannot easily be compensated*.

* Polit. Arith. chap. 4.

6. Another advantage which France lays claim to still remains, which it may also be necessary to consider; namely, the boasted security of her coasts. — Some defects, as stated by Mr. Deslandes, it is certain have been unsuccessfully attempted. — But this circumstance is not owing to the peculiar strength of the French coasts, but to the unavoidable risque and danger by which such undertakings are attended, and which nothing but such a scheme as an ingenious author of our own country suggests can possibly prevent.* — No friend to humanity however can regret that nature has thrown some obstacles in the way of so obnoxious a species of warfare, which nothing but necessity can justify.

Strength of
its coasts.

7. There is but one advantage which France is possessed of, which Great Britain has any reason to envy or regret; namely, the fortunate position of the port of Brest, situated in a peninsula which stretching far into the ocean, is of great service to expe-

Position of
Brest.

* Horsley, on Maritime Affairs, p. 88, &c. Some excellent hints are thrown out by this author on the subject of the navy.

to August 8
1792

dite the sailing of her fleets. But this advantage, even in the opinion of Frenchmen, is overbalanced by the great distance of that naval arsenal from the court and the capital. A circumstance which has ever proved a very considerable impediment to the success of her naval operations *.

Such are the natural claims of England; and the absurd pretensions adduced in favour of France to the dominion of the sea. — It will next be necessary to consider what were the consequences of the many advantages which the former enjoys for the acquisition of maritime power; and with what justice it may be asserted, that the naval exertions of Great Britain against France have been almost uniformly successful.

Naval transactions, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

It is unnecessary to trace the maritime history of England, or of any other power in Europe, to a remoter period than the reign of Queen Elizabeth. For though the

* Brest is 300 miles from Paris, Portsmouth but 73 from London. Had Brest been only 70 miles from Paris, the late fortunate excursion of Admiral Barrington to the French coast, would not probably have turned out so successful.

commence-

commencement of the English navy has been supposed by some to have taken place in the year 1512, when commissioners to manage our naval affairs were first appointed; and though ever since a certain number of strong and great ships of war have been permanently and regularly kept on foot by the crown, yet for many years afterwards, no remarkable exploits at sea seem to have taken place.

Even in the time of Queen Elizabeth, which has always been considered a maritime reign, the royal navy of England was not remarkable for the number of its ships of war. — Sir Edward Coke thinks it matter of boast that it amounted to thirty-three sail. But however insignificant that number may appear in these times, it was fully a match for the naval armaments of the enemies of England *.

The Spanish Armada indeed was a naval meteor, which seemed to portend destruc-

* Black. Com. vol. i. p. 418. Bolingbroke's works, vol. ii. p. 150. Queen Elizabeth at her death left 42 sail of different sizes. — Moulson's Naval Tracts, Book i.

tion wherever it bent its force; but the intrinsic strength of this armament was in truth extremely insignificant: for we are informed by a respectable Spanish author *, that the whole fleet, which consisted of 132 sail, had not on board above 8252 seamen.—The want of success therefore in that attempt is not to be wondered at; for the fleet of England, though inferior in respect to the size of its vessels, yet had on board no less a number than 15,785 men well skilled in maritime affairs †.

The naval successes of Queen Elizabeth against the Spaniards, raised the reputation of this island to the highest pitch.—She became the terror of Europe—and it is said, that in the year 1601, the French, whole pi-

* Uztariz on Commerce, vol. iii. p. 392.

† The following seems to be an exact state of the strength of the two fleets, as given us by Spanish as well as English writers.

	Ships.	Tons.	Sailors.	Soldiers.	Slaves.
The Spanish Armada	132	59120	8252	21835	2068
The English fleet	197	129744	15785	11875	10000

Vide Entick's Naval History, p. 261. He states the number of Spanish seamen at 8766, but I rather trust to the authority of Herrera and Uztariz.

tiful navy did not exceed three ships of war, however trifling that number may appear, were not permitted by that spirited princess to build the smallest addition to it*.

The pacific government of James the First, was not conspicuous for any great maritime efforts: but at the same time we may learn from the writings of a contemporary author, in what estimation our commerce and naval forces were considered. This writer, though a Frenchman and a courtier, fairly confesses, after stating that England might assemble 400 vessels of different sizes, that he could say very little (on n'en peut dire grand chose) of the marine of France†.

Reign of
James the
First.

The reign of James the First is however distinguished by a circumstance so humbling to the naval pride of France, that every author who has written upon that subject has not failed to take notice of it.—

* Grey's Debates, vol. iii. p. 35. and vol. v. p. 332.

Britannia Lanquens, p. 257.

† *Etat's du Monde*, p. 12 and 103.

When the timidity of this monarch, and the bold and daring spirit by which Henry the fourth was distinguished are remembered, it is scarcely possible to conceive that the latter should suffer himself to shrink under the naval force which his neighbours was possessed of; yet we are informed that in the famous embassy made by the Duke of Sully to the court of Britain, the vessel he was on board of, though commanded by a Vice Admiral of France, was obliged to strike its colours to a yacht, belonging to England, and to render (as the officers of this little vessel termed it) to the king their master, the honours due to him as sovereign of the sea*.

Reign of
Charles I.

Even the reign of Charles the First is not destitute of circumstances which prove how much the French dreaded the powerful fleet which England was possessed of.— For though no engagement took place between the naval armaments of the two nations, yet Cardinal Richelieu confessed the

* *Letters du Cardinal D'Osat*, tom. ii. p. 238, n. 1.

Deslandes on Maritime Power and Commerce, p. 76.

Craftsman, No. 155, vol. i. p. 28.

superiority

superiority of England by building a barricado across the entry of the port of Rochelle, knowing well that nothing but such a contrivance, could prevent the English from relieving the besieged in that city, whenever they thought proper*.

Whilst Oliver Cromwell governed these kingdoms, there is not the smallest reason to imagine that the French had any hopes of rivalling Great Britain.—He who compelled the citizens of a free commonwealth to crouch submissively to his power, would have smiled at the puny efforts of a nation governed by a priest. Indeed it is acknowledged by a very intelligent author, that in the year 1653, the French could not send 10 ships of 50 guns each to sea, whilst the English were able to fit out ten times as many, and of much larger rates†.

Oliver
Cromwell,

It was during the administration of this contemptible monarch of a free people, that the French laid the foundations of their na-

Reign of
Charles II.

* Histoire de France par Millet, vol. iii. p. 206.

† Casteln's Political Annals, vol. i. p. 21.

val strength. Nothing could be superior to the policy of Lewis XIVth, in pursuing his great object of acquiring for his Kingdom the advantages of maritime power; he fomented the division between the two great naval powers of England and of Holland, and alternately joined each of them, with a view of weakening the force of both, and of acquiring skill by supporting their mutual contests. Nor was the experience of his seamen dearly purchased, for care in general was taken, though the French might be numbered among the combatants, that they should have little concern with the fight.

Whilst this monarch however sat upon the throne of England, it may not be improper to remark, that such was the high idea entertained of the maritime strength of this country, that he ventured to contend with the united fleets of France and Holland. A bloody battle was fought near St. Christophers with a squadron of the confederates, in which a complete victory was obtained by Sir John Harman with only 16 sail, over 22 sail of the enemy. — This
single

10th May,
1667.

single event would have established the naval character of the English, had it not since been fortunately eclipsed by still more important victories*.

The short reign of James the Second Reign of James II. was conspicuous for great attention to maritime affairs. — That monarch began to repair the fatal errors which his brother had committed. — His dissolute and contemptible predecessor, not satisfied with giving every possible naval assistance to his ambitious neighbour, Lewis the XIVth. had even squandered in his own effeminate pleasures the money which his parliament had voted for the service of the navy. — The monarch whose reign we are now speaking of, acted a very different part. — Unfortunate however in this respect, that with the spirit of a British seaman, he was a slave to his priest, and a tyrant over his people.

The era of the revolution is justly considered to be the only period of naval rivalry. Reign of William III.

* Campbell's Lives of the Admirals, vol. ii. p. 284.

Our glorious victories over the Dutch, during this reign, come not within the scope of this little treatise.

ship

ship between France and England (the present war only excepted) and it is fortunately in our power to state the actual maritime strength of the two nations, at that era, on very respectable authority.

STATE of the NAVY of FRANCE, An. 1681.

Rate of the ships.	No.	Guns.	Major officers.	Minor officers.	Sailors.	Soldiers.	Whole crew.
First rate —	12	1080	108	1232	4132	2486	7850
2d. rate —	21	1518	189	1719	4470	2661	8850
3d. rate —	36	1028	251	2350	6142	3008	11500
4th. rate —	26	1088	156	1167	2713	1570	5459
5th. rate —	20	608	119	681	1427	682	2790
Totals —	115	6222	823	7149	18844	10407	36400
Small frigates —	24	400	125	446	937	497	1880
Fireships —	8	74	16	86	160	—	240
Barca Longas —	10	43	20	90	190	—	280
Pinks —	22	341	44	190	447	—	670
* Totals —	179	7080	1028	7955	20618	10904	39477

Such was the state of the French navy, as given us by Du Tôt, a French author of considerable authority, who affirms, that this was the most flourishing navy that ever France had (*la plus florissante marine*

* In this State, galleys are not included.

que la France ait eue) * — I shall next
give two lists of the royal navy of Eng-
land at nearly the same period.

ABSTRACT of the NAVY of
ENGLAND, Anno 1688, according
to Mr. Pepys.

Rate of the ships.	Number.	Men.	Guns.
1st. rate	9	6705	878
2d. rate	11	7010	974
3d. rate	39	16545	2640
4th. rate	41	9480	1908
5th. rate	2	260	60
6th. rate	6	420	90
Bombs	3	120	34
Fireships	26	905	218
Hoys	6	22	—
Hulks	8	50	—
Ketches	3	115	24
Smacks	5	18	—
Yatches	14	353	104
	173	42003	6930

* Reflexions Politiques sur les Finances, tom. ii. p. 374.
This book was written Anno 1732.

F

Another

Another account gives the following more favourable state of the Navy of England, at the accession of King William.

Rates.	Number.	
1	9	2 ketches
2	16	3 hoys
3	38	5 smacks
4	44	12 sloops
5	13	7 prizes
6	7	[from Barbary.

Of which 5 carried each 100 guns, In all 500

3	96	288
10	90	900
2	80	160
1	82	80
4	72	288
28	70	1960
1	66	66
2	64	128
5	62	310
3	60	180
9	54	486
1	50	50
19	48	912
		3

Ships.	Guns.	Total of Guns.
3	46	138
1	44	44
6	42	252
1	38	38
6	32	192
6	30	180
2	28	56
1	18	18
5	16	80
2	12	24
1	10	10
19	8	252
3	6	18
20	4	80
Total 196		Guns 7594

Any one who will candidly examine the state of the navy of France, and those produced of the navy of England, will scarcely attribute any superiority to the former. The number of guns in the two fleets were nearly equal, and it is to be observed, that the 42,000 men, by whom the fleet of England was manned, consisted of men skilled in maritime affairs; whereas on board

the French fleet no less than 10,000 soldiers were numbered.

Nor is it improper here to remark, that it is questionable whether France, at that period, had so many as 20,000 seamen to assist in manning her fleets.—There are in England, Scotland, and Ireland, says that excellent author Sir William Petty, above 40,000 seamen, but not a quarter so many in France *. And the Abbé of St. Pierre informs us, that though, anno 1688, the King of France could equip 100 sail, yet that there were the greatest scarcity of sailors †.—Nay, Fournier, whose great object was to persuade the world how considerable the French monarch might be at sea, calculates the whole number of seamen in France, only at 21,000, both for the royal navy, and for commerce.—If this account is not exaggerated (which Sir William Petty seems to suppose it the case), yet how could twenty out of twenty-one thousand seamen be spared for the navy alone? ‡

* Petty's Works, p. 259.

† Castel's Political Annals, Vol. I. p. 21.

‡ Petty's Works, p. 246.

We shall now examine the principal naval exploits of the two countries during the reign of this active and warlike monarch.

It is recorded as a smart saying of one of the wittiest females of the court of France, in the time of Lewis the XIVth, that since the battle of Actium, no event of very great importance, has taken place at sea: and indeed, though, whilst William sat on the throne of England, there were a number of naval engagements, yet there are but two of magnitude sufficient to be taken notice of in this little treatise: namely, the battles of Beachy-head, and of La Hogue.

The battle of Beachy-head is a strong instance of the advantage which a single active power enjoys, when opposed to the sluggish operations of a confederacy.—

That the Dutch and English had a larger force than France could possibly equip, cannot well be denied: for it appears from Lord Torrington's trial, that he might have had 30 sail more under his command, at the time of the engagement,

Battle of
Beachy-
head, June
30, 1690.

(which

(which would have rendered him superior to the enemy) if the English and Dutch admiralities had been as active as they ought to have been, in fitting out their respective fleets*.

It is singular, however, that this glorious victory, so much boasted of by the French, should have proved so unimportant.—Only six Dutch, and two English ships were sunk or burnt.—The destruction of eight sail is not a very brilliant victory; nor by any means of consequence sufficient to decide the empire of the sea.

It ought also to be remarked, that notwithstanding this skirmish, (the burning of a little village excepted) nothing of any consequence was even attempted by the French; and about the end of August,

* The French fleet amounted to 78 men of war;—the English had 34 in the engagement, and 48 more blocked up in Plymouth, or not ready as was expected.—The Dutch had 22 sail, and 12 more, which ought to have been present.—Thus, by the activity of the French, they had only 56 instead of 86 men of war to contend with.—Barrow's Naval History, Vol. II, p. 237.

when

when they understood that the fleet of the confederates was refitted, they judged it most prudent, notwithstanding their boasted victory, to seek for shelter in their own ports.—The ensuing year, the French had a fleet of only 80 sail; whereas Admiral Ruffel, with 87 English, and 21 Dutch ships, once more rode triumphant on the ocean*.

With respect to the battle of Beachy-head, it would be ridiculous indeed if a single event of that nature, so unimportant in itself, should be stated as any counter-balance to the various actions which have been so decisively favourable to the arms of Great-Britain.—In the space of almost 200 years, this is the only event which tends materially to tarnish the lustre of the British flag. It may also be remarked, that this event took place at a time when the nation was distracted by faction at home, and when its sovereign, scarcely seated on the throne of England, was contending for his rights in another king-

* Barrow's Naval History, Vol. II. p. 240.

dom.

dom. If the battle of Beachy-head proves, that the English are not invincible at Sea, it also shows that no inconsiderable superiority is necessary to insure their enemies success.

Battle of La
Hogue.

But the reign of King William is distinguished by another naval engagement, which was attended with the most important consequences. Though conscious of the inferiority of their fleet, the French, vainly trusting to the supposed treachery of some English officers, ventured out of their harbours. Their force amounted to about 50 sail.—The English fleet alone was 63 sail, and was supported by 36 Dutch ships.—The particulars of the engagement it is unnecessary to dwell upon. Suffice it to say, that 17 sail of the line, from 56 to 104 guns, were totally destroyed*. A naval disaster which the French have never, as yet, been able to recover.

In order, however, to prove the great superiority, which the English enjoyed in

* Davenant's Works, Vol. I. p. 408.

point of naval success; it may not be improper to give an abstract of the English ships of war taken or destroyed by the French; and those of France taken or destroyed by the English.

English ships, taken or destroyed by the French, in the reign of King William.

No. of Ships.	Guns each.	Total of Guns.
1 of	70	70
1 of	54	54
2 of	48	96
1 of	46	46
3 of	42	126
3 of	36	108
6 of	32	192
2 of	30	60
4 of	24	96
2 of	18	36
2 of	16	32
2 of	12	24
11 of	10	110
5 of	8	40
1 of	6	6
4 of	4	16

Total 50

Total 1112

G

French

French ships taken or destroyed.

No. of Ships.	Guns each.	Total of Guns.
2 of -	104 -	208
1 of -	90 -	90
2 of -	80 -	160
3 of -	76 -	228
1 of -	74 -	74
1 of -	70 -	70
1 of -	68 -	68
2 of -	60 -	120
4 of -	56 -	224
1 of -	50 -	50
1 of -	48 -	48
1 of -	42 -	42
1 of -	40 -	40
5 of -	32 -	160
5 of -	30 -	150
5 of -	28 -	140
1 of -	26 -	26
3 of -	24 -	72
3 of -	20 -	60
6 of -	18 -	108
1 of -	16 -	16
2 of -	12 -	24
6 of -	10 -	60
1 of -	6 -	6

Total 59

Total 2244

Thus

Thus it appears, that on the whole, there was a balance in favour of the English, amounting to no less a number than 1132 guns.

But it may be said on this, and on other occasions, how can the English pretend to have the whole glory of these successes, in which the Dutch claim so considerable a share?

The naval assistance of Holland, in this and in other wars, has never been attended with those advantageous consequences which might have been expected.—As we were always the principals in the war, they have ever contrived, that the greatest part of the burden should lie upon us : and there is scarcely an instance of their having, on any one occasion, fulfilled the whole of their engagements.—Had they been active in fitting out their fleets, and had their quotas never been deficient, the fleet of France could not, at any time, have ventured to face the navy of the allies. In the various battles in which they fought in conjunction with the English, their cou-

rage shone conspicuous; but they never had, in any engagement, that proportion to which they were bound by treaty.

Indeed, the opinion of Davenant, the author to whom I before alluded, seems to be founded on sound principles of reasoning, that the naval assistance of the Dutch, on the terms on which it was obtained, was of no service to Great-Britain *. In order to have the assistance of 40 Dutch ships, we allowed as many of our own (which we actually possessed) to lie rotting in our harbours, and, in their stead, maintained no less a number than about 40,000 soldiers on the continent †. During King William's wars, the navy cost us 18,061,938*l.* 10*s.*; and during the same space of time, the expence of our armies abroad amounted to 20,982,034*l.* 18*s.* 7*d.* If one million less had been spent every year on a land army, and expended on a fleet, it would have increased it full one third, and rendered our navy

* Davenant's Works, Vol. L. p. 405.

† Grey's Debates, Vol. X. p. 175 and 358.

so powerful, that, in the words of Davenant, "we might have carried on a war "at sea, singly by our own strength." The Dutch, therefore, whilst we paid so dearly for their assistance, are not to be considered in the light of confederates, but of mercenaries, who, receiving our pay, are not entitled to any distinct share in the glory of our conquests.—It may farther be remarked, that (King William's wars only excepted) even in those of Queen Anne, whenever we have had the assistance of the Dutch, that the powerful monarchy of Spain, has always thrown its treasure and its navy into the scale of France, which, even with that additional weight, has never as yet preponderated.

Ever since the battle of La Hogue, says the Abbé Raynal *, the naval powers of France have been upon the decline; and from that period Great-Britain has assumed the superiority. Unfortunately, however, the reign of Queen Anne was more distinguished for its attention to the land, than

Reign of
Queen Anne.

* Raynal's Hist. Vol. IV. p. 400.

to the sea-service. The brilliant success of a Marlborough, gave the nation at large a greater zest for military than naval glory; and being completely exhausted by the expence of maintaining great armies of mercenaries abroad, we had but little to lay out on the natural bulwark of Great-Britain. On the 13th of August 1704, a battle was fought near Malaga. The strength of the two fleets was nearly equal, and both sides have claimed the victory. It was undoubtedly equivalent to a victory in favour of the English, as it not only prevented the French from giving that assistance to the Spaniards, who were besieging Gibraltar, which was the great object of the armament, but also disabled them from sending any formidable squadron to sea, during the remainder of the war *.

The

* The French fleet at the battle of Malaga, consisted of 69 sail of different sizes. The English had 45; the Dutch, only 12 present at the engagement, 6 of their squadron having gone home, as no battle was expected. Had they been present, the fleets would have been exactly equal in point of numbers. No ships were taken on either side. The English and Dutch had 2719 killed and wounded, including 49 officers. The French no less than 3048 seamen, and

The following is an abstract of the English and French ships taken or destroyed in Queen Anne's war. Considering the numbers lost by England, during that period, by storms and accidents, the balance against the French, must strike every impartial person, as being truly decisive *.

and 180 officers. Vide Entick's Naval History, p. 548.
—Barrow's Hist. Vol. III. p. 79.

It is hoped, that those who are not satisfied with the authority of English writers, will give credit to the account which Voltaire gives us of the battle of Malaga: “ Immediatement après la prise de Gibraltar, la flotte Angloise, maitresse de la mer, attaqua à la vue de Malaga le Comte de Toulouse, Amiral de France: bataille indecise à la verite, mais dernier époque, de la puissance de Louis XIV. Depuis ce jour on ne vit plus de grandes flottes Françaises ni sur l'Océan, ni sur la Méditerranée.—La marine rentra presque dans l'état dont Louis XIV. l'avoit tirée, ainsi que tant d'autres choses éclatantes qui ont sous lui, leur orient, & leur couchant.”

Siccle de Louis XIV. Chap. XX.

* It is astonishing to think that the fleet of England should make such a figure as it did during this reign, considering the great exertions at land, and the number of ships which were lost by hurricanes, or by accident. On the 26th and 27th of November 1703, no less a number than thirteen men of war, with 1519 seamen, were cast away, besides numbers that were dismasted, and otherwise damaged; and when the gallant Shovel was lost on the rocks of Scilly, two sail of the line, a fifty-gun ship, and two other vessels, perished with him.

The following is an abstract of the Eng-

ENGLISH ships lost or taken.

Guns.	Ships.	Total of Guns.
80	2	160
70	4	280
60	2	120
50	8	400
48	1	48
40	2	80
36	1	36
32	4	128
30	1	30
28	1	28
24	11	264
22	1	22
	38	1596

FRENCH ships lost or taken.

Guns.	Ships.	Total of Guns.
100	4	400
90	8	720
86	8	688
74	1	74
70	3	212
64	1	64
56	1	56

Guns.	Ships.	Total of Guns.
54	4	216
50	2	100
48	1	48
40	1	40
36	2	72
34	1	34
32	1	32
30	2	60
28	1	28
24	8	192
20	3	60
	52	3094

Thus it appears that the balance in favour of England, during that war, amounted to 1498 guns, a number nearly equal to the whole loss sustained by the English, both by storms and by the enemy. This list also is exclusive of what Spanish ships were taken or destroyed.

It would be improper, however, to omit remarking, upon this occasion, that whatever might have been the success of our naval operations, during the reign of Queen

H

Anne,

Anne, yet that there are incontestable evidence of two facts: 1st. That the Dutch continued to be as deficient in furnishing their quotas, as when their own Stadholder sat upon the throne of England *: and, 2dly, that notwithstanding that great deficiency, the navy of the allies, if properly conducted, ought always to have enjoyed a considerable superiority in point of number, over the fleets of the enemy.

* Swift, in his pamphlet, intitled, "The Conduct of the Allies," throws out many hints upon this subject. "During King William's wars, he says, the sea was almost intirely neglected, and the greatest part of six millions annually employed to enlarge the frontier of the Dutch." "For the king was a general, and not an admiral; and although King of England, was a native of Holland. In Queen Anne's time, it was the kingdom's misfortune, that the sea was not the Duke of Marlborough's element, otherwise the whole force of the war, would infallibly have been bestowed there, infinitely to the advantage of his country." Page 11 and 25.

STATE of the NAVY of the ALLIES
during Queen ANNE's wars.

Years.	English Ships.	Dutch Ships.	Dutch Quota.	Dutch de- ficiency.	Allied Fleet.	Allied fleet according to treaty.
1702	74	38	44	11	107	118
1703	79	22	47	25	101	126
1704	74	18	44	26	92	118
1705	79	20	47	27	99	126
1706	78	15	46	31	93	124
1707	72	27	43	16	99	115
1708	69	25	43	18	94	112
1709	60	11	42	31	71	102
1710	62	13	37	24	75	99
1711	59	12	35	23	71	94*

From this state it appears, that the combined fleet, whilst France pretended to send any considerable squadron to sea, (which was only during the three first years of the war) always ought to have exceeded ninety sail; whereas the French could only muster sixty-nine, at the decisive battle of Malaga. What success then might we not have expected, had the Dutch, instead of being deficient in their quotas, proportionally assisted in weakening the common

* Journals of the House of Commons, Vol. XVII. p. 48.
28th Jan. 1711.

enemy. Nay, they were not only deficient, but when their fleet did appear, it was in the words of Dean Swift, no more than appearing, for they immediately separated to look to their merchants and protect their trade.

Reign of
George the
First.

31st July,
1718.

The reign of George the 1st, did not produce any transaction, which it is necessary to take particular notice of, in this tract. For though it is signalized by the decisive victory obtained on the coast of Sicily, yet the Spanish fleet alone suffered in that fortunate engagement. This period however was distinguished by the laconic epistle written by the famous Walton, in which he informed his admiral that he had taken or destroyed, as per margin, which margin contained a list of eight Spanish men of war. A few Waltons in our navy would still humble the pride of the house of Bourbon*.

Our

* The Spanish fleet mounted 1284 guns, and had on board 8830 men. The English fleet was stronger, having 1400 guns and 8885 men. Above one half of the Spanish fleet, mounting 754 guns were taken or burnt. The gallant Walton's letter is worth copying as a pattern to modern seamen.

Sir,

Our superiority at sea was highly conspicuous whilst George the Second sat upon the throne of England. The year 1747 in particular was fatal to the French navy. In one fortunate engagement fought on the 3d of May, the brave Lord Anson captured five sail of the line, a 44 gun ship, and four vessels fitted out as frigates. On the 14th of October, Admiral Hawke was equally successful, having taken five sail of the line, and a 50 gun ship. In both engagements the English squadrons were greatly superior in number to the enemy, and though the French behaved well, yet in point of skill, discipline and courage, they also seem to have been inferior*.

Reign of
George II.

We have taken and destroyed all the Spanish ships and vessels, which were upon the coast, as per margin.

I am, &c.

GEORGE WALTON.

Canterbury off
Syracusa, 16th
August, 1718.

Taken.		Guns.
1	-	60
1	-	54
1	-	40
1	-	24
Burnt.		
1	-	54
2	-	40
1	-	30
		with a fire- ship and two bomb-vessels

* Vide Entick's Naval Hist. p. 814. Hill's Naval Hist. p. 704. Sir William Mildmay's Political Treatises, particularly his Remarks on the Marine of France, contains some excellent observations upon naval matters, and especially upon the naval transactions of the war that was concluded by the treaty of Aix la Chapelle.

It

Last war.

It is surely unnecessary to enter into a detail of the naval transactions during the last war. They must still live in the memory of every Briton. If Englishmen were accustomed to fight gallantly in former times, during that war they seemed to have surpassed themselves. Of the navy of France, which with the accessions during the course of the war, amounted to 237 ships, 131 were taken by the English; and when the following statement is considered, it will be difficult to conceive how any British lord of the admiralty could afterwards gravely assert in his seat in parliament, "that the fleet of France must ever be superior to that of England, when she chose to bend her whole attention to that particular department."

STATE

STATE of the NAVY of FRANCE, last War.

	Ships.	Guns.	Men.
Line of battle -	95		
Frigates -	142		
	237	9682	110,755
Taken or destroyed by the English.			
Line of battle 47	} 131	5278	60,420
Frigates - 84			
Total of the French navy at the peace,	} 106	4404	50,335*
1763 -			

At the conclusion of the last war, it was generally supposed that Great Britain could balance by its maritime force, the navy of the universe †. Since that glorious period, how have the mighty fallen! I turn away from the disastrous scenes to which we have been lately accustomed, to contemplate better prospects.

* Letters concerning the Present State of the French Nation, p. 129. This author supposes that though 60,420 was the full complement of the ships captured or destroyed by the English, yet that not above 40,000 seamen were actually taken, exclusive of merchantmen. The value of the ships taken by the English amounted to 5,278,000 $\frac{1}{2}$.

† Raynal's Hist. vol. iv. p. 401.

If

If our seamen in the first place do not behave gallantly, they seem to me to be without excuse. The future operations of the war, must be principally confined to their element. And on their success in the naval contest in which we are engaged, their own characters, the honour of their profession, and the existence of their country must depend — Considerations which have never failed of producing the most vigorous exertions amongst that gallant race of men.

In the second place, the directors of our navy must ever be held inexcusable, if in the present state of public affairs, they shall be wanting in their duty. They will naturally avoid those rocks, on which their predecessors were shipwrecked; and as many of them in former times have themselves fought bravely, they surely will not be deficient in pointing out to others the same path to fame.

Thirdly, the king, the parliament, and the people at large, must be truly interested spectators of the naval contest we have en-

tered into. And the certain prospect of their applause, must rouse the most languid to exertion, and the most spiritless to vigour and activity. It seems necessary however that some marked and unequivocal demonstration should be given, that the navy is the peculiar and darling favourite of the publick, and the surest road to fame, to fortune, and to glory *.

These are the grounds which induce me, to hope better for the future. For though our enemies are numerous, and unfortunately united in the great object of humb-

* The institution of the *naval order*, or, *an order of the marine*, might be attended with the happiest consequences. If the general idea was approved of, it would not be difficult to sketch out the minutiae of such an institution. The colour of the ribbon ought surely to be *white*; for none should be permitted to wear that honourable mark of distinction, who had not contributed to humble the *white flag* of the house of Bourbon.

Other publick rewards also might be thought of.—For instance, a gallant and successful officer, such as the commander of the *Foudroyant*, might have the privilege of sitting in his uniform under the gallery, with British and Irish peers, when strangers were admitted into the house of commons, and of standing at the steps of the throne with noblemen's sons in the house of peers. Such privileges would gratify the natural ambition of gallant men.

ling the British flag, yet the success of their scheme, must depend fully as much upon our inactivity, as upon their strength. Let us bend our whole attention to the naval department. Let us be firm, steady, and united, and it is still possible that the war, which at present seems to threaten our own coasts, may yet be carried into the very havens of our enemies.

To conclude, if the author of these sheets has failed in his attempt to refute the noble Lord's assertion, he trusts it will be imputed, not to the weakness of the cause, but to the inability of its champion. He should consider himself on the other hand fortunate indeed, if by this simple narrative of facts, he shall convince his countrymen, that the trident of Neptune, is not as yet wrested from our hands, and that Britain may still continue the mistress of the sea.

F I N I S